



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

DECORATION & FURNITURE

A DECORATIVE TRANSFORMATION.

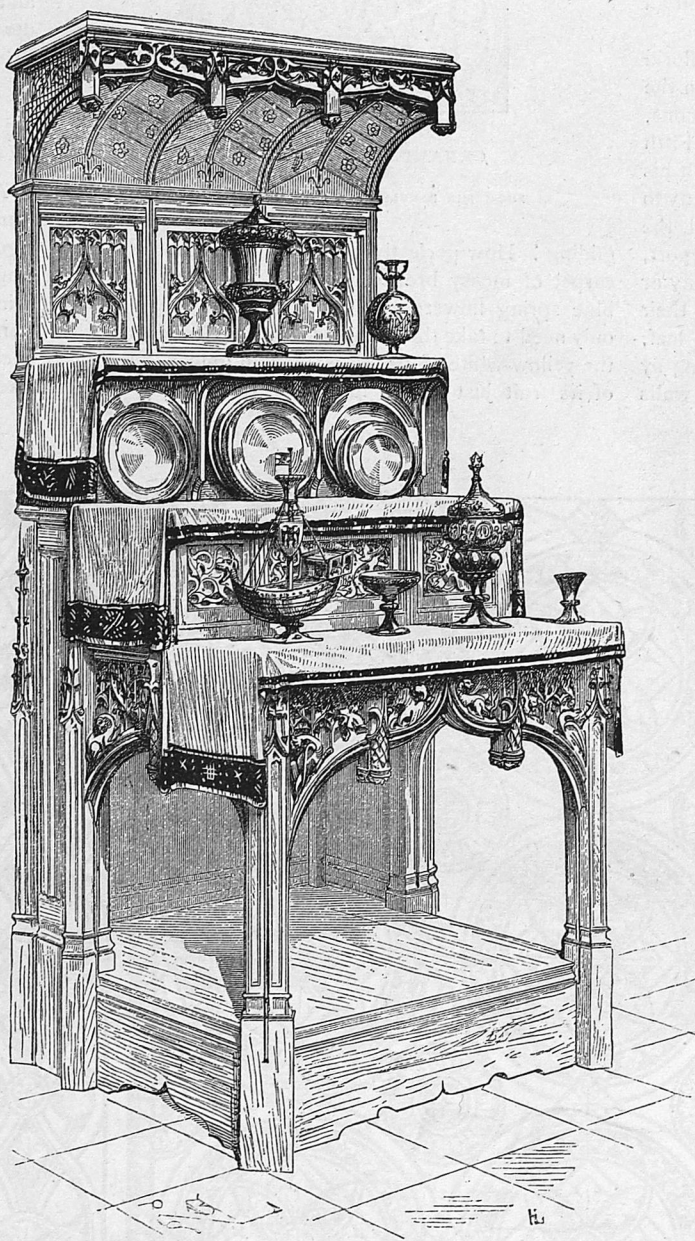
THE POSSIBILITIES OF A COMMONPLACE ROOM—
LOW CEILINGS VERSUS HIGH ONES—THE VALUE
OF COLOR.



NE of those days of enforced leisure, which are the only holidays I profess or care to keep, is upon me, and as I lie in luxurious incapacity on the big sofa, my mind busies itself with its surroundings. My gaze is bounded by the four walls and ceiling of a commonplace room in a commonplace house, such as thousands of Americans well bred and educated are expected to content themselves with, and I need no more fertile subject for speculation. You will ask what connoisseurs and artists can have to do with the fittings and furnishings of cheap and common houses. The question is important, for this is a country of large culture and small fortunes, and a great many persons of cultivated and liberal tastes are obliged to live in just such houses because artistic homes are few. Society which plans improved homes for the working classes should begin to take thought for what is due the tastes of those who rank above them. In what dull, unsuitable houses are half the wittiest and best spirits of the time to be found! What a stiff, conventional drawing-room was that of Carlyle's house in Chelsea, and how "poky" were Miss Martineau's lodgings till she was able to build her garden home in the English lake district! When one thinks of the pleasant, bright people, the journalists and artists and singers, losing half the best of life in awkward dark flats or houses which are everything that houses should not be, one sighs for an improvement in buildings of the same sort as that which has altered the style of our furniture within the last twenty years. How many of the delightful people who read this are lodged to their minds? Yet, until the influence of artistic taste has become vital in every home, it is hopeless to expect any efficient support of art from government or the people. When art in blouse and apron, with pockets stuck full of brushes and chalk in fingers, enters the every-day house and orders a change of colors here and of lights there; when its divinations have turned plain conditions into essential luxury, then villages will vote for art education in the schools, and towns will not hesitate in buying fine pictures for public galleries, or government waste patronage on the least deserving artists. One home in a neighborhood built and fitted in correct style is worth more than a professorship of art in educating the taste and the liberality of residents about it. Art as an incomprehensible luxury and a very comprehensible expense is rather a dread to the honest householder, who has the taxes and the bills to pay. But art which, with the materials and at the cost with which he is familiar, gives him a better house to live in, pleasanter light, air, furniture, and surroundings, is something he understands and for which he will pay with no more grumbling than he bestows on water rates and town taxes. And now let us see what taste can do for this ill-contrived house, which is a copy of a thousand American homes.

There is snow without over all the scene, and its chillness enters the house in the frigid deathly white of the ceiling, the frames, and the baseboards. The wall-paper is of good design, close sprays of gray-green leaves with cream-white flowers on a light dull bluish

tint, quite "Morrisy" in fact. It is an improvement on the sitting-rooms I remember about Boston in my school-days, papered with a huge wandering oak-leaf pattern in a cheerful tone of deep chocolate or pickle-green, which turned the room into a cave of darkness, and was highly commended by housekeepers for "never showing the dirt." But with the mass of white in the folding-doors, frames, and ceiling, and the light, robin's-egg blue paper, the tone of the double rooms is agreeable only in the sultriest days of July. In winter one's eyes ache with the glare of so much white paint and plaster, together with the snow-gleam from the windows. In the centre of the ceiling the builder's generous fancy has placed a plaster rosette with a gas-pipe for its pistil, and though I hear a good deal about Massachusetts culture, nineteen houses out of twenty in this genteel and wealthy suburb have just such



DRESSOIR OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

(SEE PAGE 80.)

mouldings with a cluster of gas-burners which sheds pleasing shadow over the middle of the room. The light of six burners barely allows one to read the evening paper by the fire in my rich neighbor's house. The gas company and I have been strangers since my first housekeeping, for I think too much of my ivies and ferns to compass their death, to say nothing of my own, by feeding them on diluted carbonic acid gas. Now suppose the builder had taken the cost of that hideous centre-piece of plaster, which I see by the price list in a trade magazine cost about five dollars, into an inexpensive ceiling paper, or that he had saved himself four of the five dollars and given the ceiling a wash of tinted kalsomine with a darker cornice. Kalsomine is

cheap truly, yet no more so for the wall than crayons for the sketches you are pleased to hang on it. And it comes in soft shades of pale fawn, buff, and shadowy warm grays, any of which would be grateful relief after the staring white ceilings which try our eyes. It is not desirable for walls because it rubs off, but for ceilings this is no objection, and most of us will gladly compound with the builders to be spared elaborate plaster centre-pieces and cornices, for the sake of a tinted ceiling or a good ceiling paper not too deep in color or striking in design. The ornaments of a ceiling can hardly be too sketchy or too quiet in tone. "I don't like B.'s house," said a whimsical, fastidious artist, speaking of a friend whose home was ornamented like a sugar-plum box; "there's so much fresco and figuring I can't find a blank corner for my thoughts." An over-decorated ceiling seems to say to one, "Thus far shall your imagination

rise—to my carmine and gold, but not beyond them." The time will come when an advanced taste will consider the passion for ornament—of which people speak as a religious merit, or a finer instinct on which they pride themselves—only a gluttony of sense, to be disdained of the cultivated who have learned the secret of not too much. Between my cold white ceiling and that of the Plantagenet Smiths, where a two-foot border of India red surrounds a field of black and gold diaper, there is not so very much to choose in an artistic sense. You will have no farther to go than the first great hotel which prides itself on its æsthetic tea-rooms to experience the "sat-upon" feeling left by one of these gorgeous ceilings.

Another grievance of my house, and one which irks my soul every day and week of my life, is that its walls are too high, measuring eleven feet to the cornice, and that dreadful white ceiling makes them look still higher. Two feet could be taken off for convenience and good effect, but happening to say so to a friend, I was transfixed with a stare of educated scorn, and a rebuke which brought ventilation, health, refinement, and dignity offended about my ears. Everybody is brought up to believe high ceilings essential to these conditions, and I remember, when I was sure of more things than I ever shall be again, writing vigorous youthful scorn of "poky" people who did not build rooms high enough to agree with the standard. Some years' experience living in different sorts of houses has convinced me that the best ventilation and the most convenience can be secured with any ceiling eight feet high. This fact was settled in my own mind before finding that the best writers on ventilation agree that change of air and not the amount of air is the condition of pure breath and comfortable atmosphere in-doors. Were your walls twenty feet high, they would only be storage of so much dead, unwholesome air, unless the current was kept up from without. It is on this delicate, constant change of air that the safety and purity of your rooms depend. Don't conjure up the

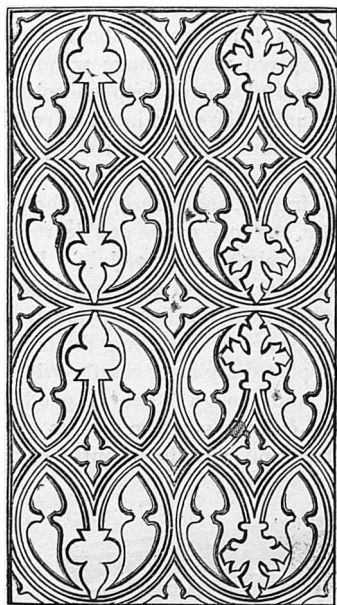
idea of a draught of chilly air constantly coursing over you to your settled misery. You have read to small purpose if you have not learned what we owe to the courtly and luxurious Cardinal Prince Polignac, who so detested the coal smoke which in his day "spoiled the linen, lace, eyes, and skin of the court ladies," that he introduced the ventilating fireplace, which is urged as the latest improvement of our day. With hypersensitive nerves which make a perpetual plague and penance of sullied air, the most supremely comfortable room I ever knew was a country parlor eight feet high, which had the improvement of a ventilating fireplace. Is not your old-fashioned summer cottage, with its low rooms and transoms over the doors and freely opened win-

dows, cooler in August than your town house with its fourteen-foot ceilings, where the air stagnates above the doors? From a decorative point of view the favor is all on the side of lower walls. The proportion between the size of a room and its height was well understood by the old English builders, and it is one which a chamber fifteen by seventeen and eleven feet high does not have. Such a room looks better to an educated eye if not more than eight and a half feet high. Wait till you see a room of this size furnished in the delicacies of the refined modern style, which we may call the "reminiscence," with its flavorings of Queen Anne and Hampton Court models touched with Pompadour lightness, its walls hung with tiny rosebud chintzes, its two-foot wainscot of light French walnut or deep maple cunningly enriched in tone by the secrets of polishers, its broad casements inviting the sun to the pots of rosemary and gilliflower on the ledges, its dwarf cabinets and secretary, its low side-brackets under the mirrors, with no monumental over-mantel hanging heavy in the centre of the view, but a broad low mantel filled with flowers and unobtrusive corner shelves instead, and old-fashioned corner cupboards with fluted mouldings—a room where the English tapestry carpet in lovely faded colors, fawn and rose and blues, blends with the tints of embroidered cushions and screens, and turning tables with china trays and tea-services and all the quaint knick-knacks of the style.

High walls belong to the cheerless finery of the florid French style, whose palaces and mansions figure in the mind as entirely given up to suits of splendid saloons, where life was all toilette and ceremony. Dives of Fifth Avenue may require sixteen-foot ceilings to exhibit his frescoes properly, but then he is charged with a duty to society, of showing off properly and grandly. Still, the colonial houses, which one admires at Newburyport, Hingham, and Portsmouth, lack no trait of dignity or pleasantness in their beautiful old rooms with their panelling and carved festoons of laurel and olive leaf, their fluted pilasters and broad genial windows hung by ancient honeysuckle or sweet-brier. Although the walls of their state drawing-rooms are not more than nine feet high, their fair and home-like proportions and their reserve of ornament attract and fasten the gaze accustomed to the Egyptian heaviness of the two- or three-foot frieze which the modern decorator projects to bring down his fourteen-foot ceiling. The low room can be decorated to the best effect, and with such ease that it commends itself to amateur artists on this account. It is entirely practicable to plan charming changes of arrangement, which can be carried out with a step-ladder and a maid or man of all work, instead of the inroads of workmen with their scaffolds and litter. You can paint and gild your own cornice, or put up a narrow frieze after your own fancy—a Japanese heading one season, or myrtle garlands the next; you can hang your plaques and pictures, and arrange over-doors and cabinets to your liking. You have your room well in hand, with a wall whose top you can reach from a high chair, and you can be much more certain of having it kept in order where the maid does not have to strain her arms working long-handled brushes, or risk her neck with a high step-ladder. Where expense has to be considered—and where does it not?—the mere cost of that unsatisfactory two and a half feet of wall, lath and plaster, would allow a latitude of decoration which would retrieve the character of ordinary houses.

The labor and materials of the unnecessary parts of this bare prosaic room would allow a low panelling of cherry or some stained glass to temper the sunshine of the west window, or a tiled mantel with carved shelf above it—some gleam of grace and taste at which the poor plaster rosette in the ceiling is the sole, faint attempt, unless I except the reversed ogee moulding which heads the baseboards, and serves no purpose save adding a line of shadow on the white

when it happens to gather a day's dust. The deep showy mouldings of the woodwork are rather an affliction also. One would fancy better a flat frame with grooved beading in the centre and four foils at the corners. And, pushing device farther, how perfectly the room would suit its furnishings if the wood-work were all painted a shade of bronze-green with lines of dull



ORNAMENTAL METAL-WORK.

FROM THE PANELS OF A MÆDIEVAL IRON DOOR.

gilding! How perfectly it would frame with the Morris carpet of mossy bronze sprinkled with dull pink and blue spring flowers and herbage. The paper would only need to take the gray-olive for its ground tint, with the yellow-white of its blossoms and golden fawn hue of its fruit just set, to make the room compose to a

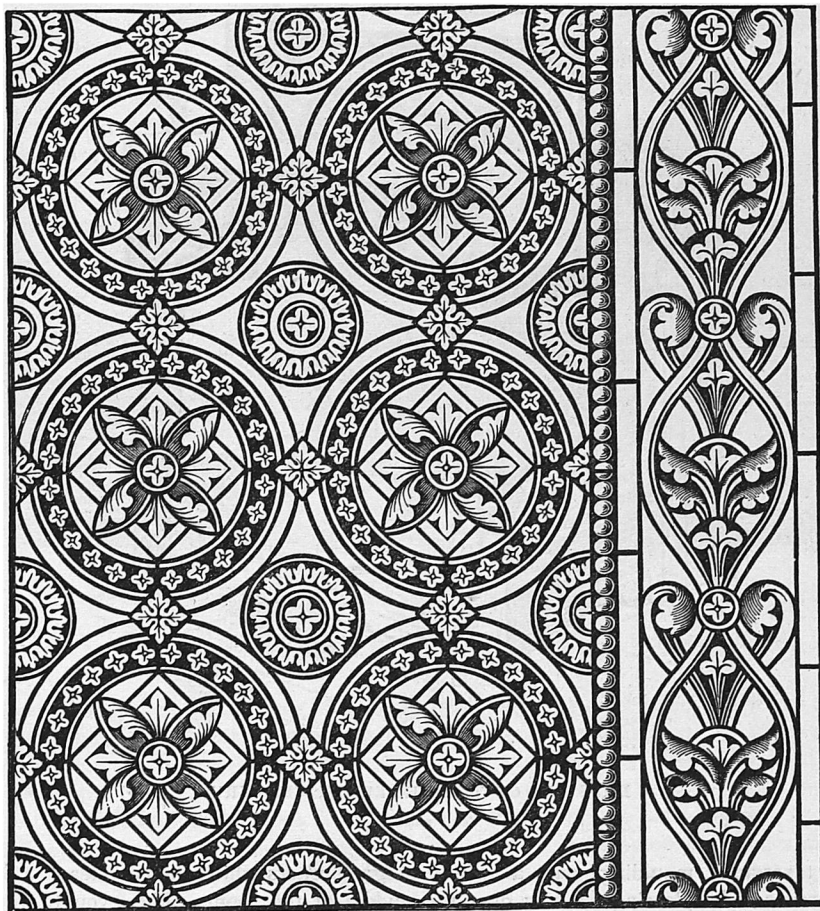
the hard pine like polished ivory or the firmness of bronze. The work requires as much skill as hand polish on hard wood, and the result is as lasting. The cheap paint of our houses, scaling away in a few years and yielding at once to cleaning, bears no comparison with the enamel paint which seems ingrained with the wood and resists rubbing like shell inlay. The beauty of its finish in low polish, without gloss, is admired, and its color gives endless variety and assistance to decoration. Such paint will wear for twenty years, and prove cheaper than common paint or stain, though nearly as expensive as hard wood at first.

Can you see now my reconstructed room, with bronze-brown carpet lit with dull pink and blue, its borders and doors of dead green bronze lined in dull gold, and its walls of olive gray blent with orange flower; a low broad mantel of light walnut with one carved oversheff only a foot above it, and centre mirror in lightly carved, narrow frame; the corner shelves of walnut each side the chimney, with dwarf spindle railings to keep books and china safe; the small settee with flat carved frame in unpolished wood, and cushions of Persian broché; plenty of low broad stools of needlework which offer tempting seats; curtains made from broché shawls in close Persian patterns; a bay window full of mignonnette and pink and white Holland tulips, and a writing-table in the window, with gypsy stand and deep blue Nankin teacups beside it? This is the picture with which I conjure away base realities.

SHIRLEY DARE.

THIRTEENTH CENTURY STAINED GLASS.

AMONG the various designs applied to stained glass during the thirteenth century those where the human figure was altogether excluded, and a rich and sparkling brilliancy was produced by making up the entire windows of florid mosaic patterns within a framework composed of every conceivable combination of geometrical forms, are not the least interesting, nor the least useful in supplying hints for compositions applicable to other purposes and other materials. The accompanying illustration is taken from a window of this character in the church of St. Remi at Rheims. The colors are as follows: The band on each side the border is red, the second on the inner side being white. Those running up the border and the roses combining them are white. The branches passing behind these are yellow, with a green leaf between them and resting upon a white one. The four following leaves are purple; and that from which they spring green. The spaces between the various circles in the body of the window are all yellow; the smaller ones are white, with the exception of the rose in the centre and the band round it, which are red. The colors of the larger circles are varied alternately. In the one the outer band and rose in the middle are blue, the square pattern green, the spaces between the square and circle red, and the rest white. In the other the outer circle is green, the square portions blue and the intervening spaces red. The large flower in the centre and the band covered with quatre-foils are white. All the roses intersecting the circles are purple.



THIRTEENTH CENTURY STAINED GLASS.

FROM A WINDOW IN THE CHURCH OF ST. REMI AT RHEIMS.

delight. Such magic can the old fairy Taste work with her wand on Cinderella's surroundings.

In cases where a hard-wood finish is not available, builders should know the value of good color applied to the framing of a room. The fashion is revived in French country houses of decorations in enamel applied to wall panels and doors. By the use of many coats of fine paint well rubbed down a surface is given to

kitchen "dresser" (which, on account of its humble position in the house, has escaped the supposed embellishment which generations of furniture-makers have inflicted on its more pretentious kindred in the salon), but also of the magnificent side-board and buffet. Its honest construction and nobility of form should commend it to the emulation of the cabinet-makers of the day. The picturesque staircase view